



From Access to End Markets: St. Peters Delivers Systemwide Recycling Change

St. Peters, Missouri

A NEW ERA OF RECYCLING, POWERED BY COMMUNITY ACCESS, BEHAVIOR CHANGE, AND CAPTURE OF VALUABLE MATERIALS.

Two years ago, St. Peters, Missouri had a system that wasn't working. Recycling was opt-in and bag-based. Access was limited. Polypropylene, found in everyday items like yogurt cups and butter tubs, wasn't being recovered. Residents wanted to recycle, but the system wasn't built for success.

Today, that's changed. With support from The Recycling Partnership, including the Polypropylene Recycling Coalition, American Beverage Association's Every Bottle Back initiative and Missouri Beverage Association, the city set out to build a better system. And now, St. Peters is setting the pace for regional circularity, proving that when access, participation, processing, and end markets all work together, real transformation follows.

Access: From Opt-In to All-In

In 2024, St. Peters and neighboring Cottleville replaced its bag collection with 95-gallon recycling carts, reaching over 20,000 homes. In March 2025, O'Fallon brought 30,000 more households into the system. This wasn't just an equipment upgrade, it was a decisive shift toward equitable, permanent recycling access across the region.

Each cart came with tailored instructional materials backed by a dedicated city website and phone line. Residents weren't left to figure it out. They were equipped to get it right from day one.

"Access without instruction doesn't work," said Taylor Sorenson, community program manager at The Recycling Partnership. "This kind of on-the-ground support gives residents the tools to participate confidently."



For the U.S. residential recycling system to function effectively, five requirements must be met:

Design

Packaging must be built to be recycled.

Access

Every household needs convenient recycling from home.

Participation

People must have the information to be motivated to recycle.

Processing

Facilities must handle materials effectively.

End Markets

Old stuff has to become new stuff.

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Participation: Behavior that Lasts

Residents responded. Participation grew. Contamination dropped. At Recycle City, the region's materials recovery facility (MRF), the contamination rate is now down to 10%, nearly four times lower than the national average.

To expand this impact, The Recycling Partnership launched a study in summer 2025 across 50,000 households in St. Peters, O'Fallon, and Cottleville. The study tracks baseline polypropylene recovery and tests behaviorally informed messaging to find out what truly motivates residents to recycle more and recycle better. It will track results in recycling behavior through the end of 2025.

"The Recycling Partnership's guidance and expertise enabled us to achieve upgrades quickly and broadcast targeted residential communication to establish an incredible recycling program," said Elliot Schneider, the City's Manager of Environmental and Fleet Services.

Processing: Upgrading for Materials that Matter

While carts were rolling out in 2024 and early 2025, the city was also overhauling Recycle City. Part of the overhaul, with support from the Polypropylene Recycling Coalition, included new equipment like a conveyor and machine specifically designed to capture polypropylene.

This upgrade enables the facility to sort and recover items like yogurt cups, deli containers, and takeout packaging that had previously been left behind. That's improving material quality, reducing contamination, and keeping thousands of pounds of recyclable material out of landfills, while moving more back into the recycling supply chain.

"The Recycling Partnership's guidance and expertise were essential in revitalizing Recycle City and beginning a new era of recycling in the St. Peters area," Schneider said. "We have big plans to carry this momentum forward and grow recycling throughout our community."

End Markets: Closing the Loop with Polypropylene

The new recycling carts are now in use, and the upgraded MRF is open and running smoothly. What's captured is now recovered and reused. Polypropylene is moving back into manufacturing as high-quality feedstock, enabling new packaging to be made from recycled materials instead of raw resources.



AT THE PARTNERSHIP, OUR MISSION IS SIMPLE. IT'S TO BUILD A BETTER RECYCLING SYSTEM. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.

CODY MARSHALL, CHIEF RECYCLING OFFICER,
THE RECYCLING PARTNERSHIP

A Regional Model, Ready to Scale

"We added a multitude of cameras and built a learning lab that provides a real-time visual aid from inside the sortation equipment to engage our audience," Schneider said. He added that a neighboring community was planning to mimic St. Peters' program, and others could follow suit.

"At The Partnership, our mission is simple. It's to build a better recycling system," said Cody Marshall, The Recycling Partnership's chief recycling officer, at the Recycle City ribbon-cutting ceremony in July. "That's exactly what's happening here."

Want to build real recycling impact in your community?

Start with access. Back it with education. Build the processing infrastructure. And make sure there's a market for what you recover.

PARTNER WITH US. LET'S BUILD A BETTER RECYCLING SYSTEM, TOGETHER.